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ABSTRACT

One of the aims of the Women's Studies Program at Michigan State University (East Lansing) is to augment undergraduate major programs by introducing the experiences of women into the various disciplines and involving students in inter-disciplinary studies. The College of Arts and Letters (ATL) offers a special topic course called "Women in America" which enrolls over 800 students every year in a three-term sequence that culminates in a research paper. Library instruction for ATL is the responsibility of the library information/reference department, which offers sessions in the library during the "research term" of the three-term sequence, to provide instruction in research strategies. During the instruction sessions, students are introduced to feminist issues. The success of the sessions has led to a three credit hour course, "Bibliographic Methods for Women's Studies Research." The structure for the instructional design and the methods used for each element of the learning model are provided in this course development description. (NL)

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# The Role of the Librarian in an Undergraduate Women's Studies Program

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The Role of the Librarian in an Undergraduate Women's Studies Program

The Setting: Michigan State University, the first agricultural college in the United States and the model for the land-grant institutions, enrolls approximately 42,000 students, making it one of the largest universities in terms of student body in the country. Fifty-two percent of undergraduates, and 45% of graduates, are women. Nestled within this large, complex institution is a thriving women's studies program. The program is jointly overseen by the College of Arts and Letters and the College of Social Sciences and administered by a program director. The program is poised to proposed a major, and many of the program's courses and activities are being viewed as prototypes for a university-wide revamping of the curriculum to reflect a more diverse, multi-cultural approach to instruction. Currently, the program offers a thematic which is intended to augment undergraduate major programs by introducing the experience of women into the study of various disciplines and involving students in interdisciplinary studies. Courses for the thematic come from academic programs all over campus and are tied together by an Introduction to Women's Studies course and a senior seminar.

Over the years, the "feeder" course into the thematic has been through American Thought and Language (ATL), the university's composition component. ATL offers a special topic section called "Women in America" which enrolls over 800 students every year. ATL is a three-term sequence, culminating in a "research" term in the Spring, where students are normally required to write

a paper. Library instruction for ATL is the responsibility of the Information/Reference department

which offers sessions in the library during the research term to provide basic-level orientation and instruction in research strategies. As the women's studies bibliographer, I assume responsibility for the "Women in America" classes, conducting approximately eighteen instructional sessions for over 450 students each spring.

During the instruction session, students are introduced to sources and strategies as well as to feminist issues in research and library use. For example, I discuss the structure of the card catalog and periodical indexes in relation to sexist language. I provide examples of some of the more offensive subject headings of the past, problems that still exist, and activist efforts of individuals like Joan Marshall and organizations like the National Council for Research on Women and the Association of College and Research Libraries Women's Studies Section to address problems with language in libraries. I also talk briefly about the classification system and the pros and cons of an integrated vs. a segregated collection. Critical analysis and evaluation of information is another area covered in the session--what an article in National Review says about abortion is going to present very different opinions and perspectives than one from Off Our Backs. Many ATL faculty also stress government documents as sources for research, so it is important to point out that biases can exist in a seeming objective government publication as well.

Specific source recommendations are handled mostly through handouts, the thinking being that the "show and tell" approach has never been a particularly effective means of library instruction. I also need to constantly caution myself against two things: first, "information overload" since these students are naive library users and second, consciousness-raising since most student in the class would not consider themselves feminists. I want them to think about the organization of libraries, that libraries are not untouched by social movements, and that the adage "information is power" has special meaning for women.

Following the session, students frequently seek me out for one-on-one discussions of their topics, recommendations of sources, or problems they are having in their research. ATL faculty are my best advertising, and frequently refer students to me for assistance. The personal experience helps present libraries and librarians in a positive light and cracks some stereotypes. Another added bonus is that I learn what topics are "in" and can see what materials are in high demand. The success of library instruction to the ATL "Women in America" courses has had several outcomes. First of all, many students who take the course sign up for other women's studies classes and some work their way through the thematic. Secondly, it has provided a model for instruction between the library and an academic program. Thirdly, it has developed a network of active faculty library users for me to draw on as the women's studies bibliographer. ATL faculty frequently recommend purchases to me, and there is no

question that the ATL students are the heaviest users of women's studies materials in the library. Finally, the success of the instructional activities with ATL laid the groundwork for a new course offered through the Women's Studies Program called "Bibliographic Methods for Women's Studies Research."

The first and most notable factor in the development of this course was that the proposal came from an ATL faculty member who is also director of the WS program. Whereas many libraries often struggle to get support for library-related classes, Beth Woodard, former WS bibliographer, and I were encouraged to propose a course curriculum. The course falls under the rubrick of "Special Topics in Women's Studies," a section through which a number of different courses rotate. A syllabus was developed, and Beth and I attended a meeting of the University Curriculum Committee to support the addition of the course to the Women's Studies Program. The course was approved and offered for the first time during Winter Term, 1988, to a class of 15. By this time, Beth had left the university, so I taught the course alone.

The 3-credit class has several objectives:

--to give students a working knowledge of the library and to introduce them to library resources across disciplines;

--to examine how information is gathered and organized and to learn techniques for evaluating sources;

--to apply this knowledge to addressing various research problems in women's studies.

Four different approaches to instruction were used: lec-

tures, readings and class discussion, presentations by library specialists and women's studies faculty, and small group work on various research problems.

Lecture topics included subject access and language, information organization, online searching, and research strategies. Readings were from a number of articles as well as lists of sources from Susan Searing's An Introduction to Library Research in Women's Studies. Students would be responsible for examining different sources in the library and reporting back to the class. Presentations were given by library staff on special collections, microforms, and government documents and by WS faculty on research in progress and their personal library use and research strategies.

Most important to the course format were the small-group problem-solving sessions based on the pedagogical approach put forward by Cerise Oberman in her B.I. classic, "Petals Around a Rose." Oberman proposes a model for instruction that merges two models in education theory, the learning cycle and guided design. Both models address three basic components in the library learning process: identification and analysis of a research problem, linkage between the problem and library resources that address the problem, and evaluation of potential source materials used to research the problem. Three small group sessions were held to address each of these components. For the first session, held during the second class meeting, students read the introduction to Dale Spender's Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them.

In their groups, they identified the research problem and its rival hypotheses (arguments that could be made against Spender's position--ones that she will have to consider refuting). Then they speculated on the types of library resources that might address the research question and implications the research question has on libraries.

The second group session moved from identification of the problem to analyzing reference tools and linking them to the types of questions they might answer. Each group was given a set of 8 questions that they categorized into two groups by the type of answer that would be needed to respond to the question. Students then described how the questions in one category were similar and different from the questions in the other. After this part of the exercise, there was a brief whole class discussion on question analysis and simple vs complex questions. Then the groups met again to select one complex question, determine disciplines which the question related, and analyze the scope of the research question (i.e., time frame, geographic area, language, etc.). Finally, the research question was linked to library resources broken down into two categories, fact tools and finding tools.

The third group session was a synthesis of the first two and required a thorough analysis of a research question. Students were given an editorial page from a newspaper on the subject of mother's rights and were asked to imagine that they were using it as background for a research paper. They identified disciplines

that needed to be considered, listed key words they would use to identify information on the topic, and ways they would narrow the topic. Next, they specified types, not specific names, of library sources they would use, created names of 5 tools that they would like to have to answer the question, and finally, evaluated 5 types of sources (encyclopedia, magazine article, newspaper article, book, and journal article) on 5 criteria (retrieval, accuracy, currency, level of information, and breadth).

Small group problem-solving was a valuable means for collective exploration, invention, and discovery, the three key elements of the learning model described by Oberman. These elements reinforce learning and develop critical thinking skills. In terms of application, students were required individually to prepare two annotated bibliographies during the course and to maintain a research log describing their research process, sources they used, problems they encountered, etc. Some students were more successful than others at being able to translate what went on in the small groups to their own research. Many of them also found the small group work frustrating. Since it required them to work collectively through each assignment, a grade was given to the group as a whole which resulted in much discontent from the more grade-conscious who felt that others were benefitting unfairly. The teaching experience was definitely a learning experience for me. There were issues for which I was unprepared, such as the group grading controversy. Also, funding for my posi-

tion was and is a problem. The WS program strongly advocated that I get paid for teaching, so I taught as an "overload" to my library job. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism in place for paying "non-college" faculty, so the program used funds allocated for a photocopy machine to my salary. This problem is still not resolved although we have discussed the need for a permanent pool of funds for my position as well as other unaffiliated faculty.

Despite these few drawbacks, the experience and the positive evaluations from the students made it well worth doing, and I hope to be able to teach the class again next spring. The value of this depth of library instruction to students is unquestioned--I still see many of the students from the class, and they are frequent and less frustrated library users. Also, the experience has been useful for me as a reference librarian to see what problems students run into in our library that we can hopefully address--signage, instructional handouts, improved training at service points, reference service objectives to name a few. Finally, in my role as WS bibliographer, teaching increased my interaction with other faculty and has really helped me to becoming a fully participating member in the program, the "compleat" librarian, if you will. A course of this nature is really bibliographic instruction at its best, allowing the librarian both to teach and to see the results of that instruction.

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